



105th Session of the International Labour Conference, 3 June 2016

*Plenary Statement by Katherine Hagen
on behalf of Graduate Women International (GWI),
a non-governmental organisation in special consultative status
with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC),
formerly known as the International Federation of University Women*

Honourable Chair and Distinguished Delegates, Graduate Women International (GWI) is a membership-based international NGO based in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in over 80 countries. Founded in 1919, as the International Federation of University Women (IFUW), GWI is the leading girls' and women's global organisation advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels.

GWI advocates for enhancing women's economic participation as a means to promote international sustainable growth and economic development, increase health and living standards and contribute to women's agency and empowerment. GWI welcomes the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including *Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* and its significance for *Goal 8 to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and development for all*.

GWI thus strongly shares the position articulated by the ILO Director-General Guy Ryder in his report to the Conference on the End to Poverty Initiative that a significant challenge for ending poverty is to address the cross-cutting issue of gender equality as integral to sustainable poverty eradication and sustainable job growth. We are impressed with the design of the cover page to his report that captures the inter-relatedness of job creation and decent work to the entire 2030 Agenda, and we believe that a similar design can be shown for the inter-relatedness of gender equality to the entire 2030 Agenda, including SDG 8 on job creation and decent work. The 2013 Agenda challenges us all to pursue thematic platforms in collaborative and transformational partnerships.

As the Director-General states in his report, there have been significant improvements in the lives of millions of people in the past decades, and yes, there has also been significant progress towards gender equality – and we recognize this is due in large part to the leadership of the ILO in setting standards for non-discrimination in employment and related standards that promote gender equality. But he also confirms what ILO experts have been documenting that the course of global events is moving against the direction of social justice. Growing inequalities in the world today are especially daunting for gender inequalities, and we fully

endorse his point that the fight for gender equality – which is also the fight for equality in general - calls for innovative new thinking and action.

In addition to the Director-General's report, this Conference is working through three substantive committees on issues that will benefit from the mainstreaming of a gender perspective – the role of decent work in global supply chains, employment and decent work for the transition to peace and in the review of the social justice declaration. In all three of these endeavours, GWI proposes the following three points.

First, the economic empowerment of women – as articulated both in SDG 5 and SDG 8 of the 2030 Agenda – should be fully integrated into any standard, policy, road map, plan of action or guidance that is developed through these committees. In global supply chains, for example, the exploitation of women in low paid jobs at the bottom of many supply chains should be specifically addressed, while the key element of strengthening small and medium enterprises should fully integrate strategies to increase access by women to the training, financing and access to markets that are so important for SMEs to participate more equitably in these global supply chains.

Second, GWI urges the integration of a gender perspective in the importance of vocational education and training in crisis or displacement situations. GWI strongly supports implementation of strategies and policies that generate more jobs and decent work for women in the formal sector. Women and girls are more likely to be represented in the informal labour market and particularly likely to be excluded from the formal labour market following crisis or displacement. Above and beyond access to vocational education and training for women in this settings, GWI has been a strong advocate of skills upgrading especially for science, technology, engineering and math or STEM skills for women and girls. And this really could be one of the ways to introduce innovative new thinking and action for basic education and adaptation to changing circumstances, whether in times of transition to peace or in times of increasing mobility generally.

Third, GWI appreciates the need for better gender disaggregated data on women's economic empowerment. This should be part of the strategy for taking the declaration on social justice for a fair globalization to serve as an informed platform on the four pillars of employment, social protection, social dialogue and fundamental principles and rights at work.

Finally, GWI supports the promotion of women's leadership at high-level economic decision-making, including at the International Labour Conference. GWI welcomes the efforts by the ILO, including with letters from the Director-General to under-represented delegations, to increase the participation of women as heads of delegations at the Conference and in senior positions through these delegations. A report from the ILO Office documents that representation of women in 2015 was over 30 per cent for the first time in the history of the ILO. However, the report also notes that the representation continues to be highly uneven, with Government delegations having a higher proportion of women than either the Employers or Workers delegation. This is yet another example of progress toward gender equality but with unfinished business remaining – especially where the goal needs to be one of gender parity, which is defined by the United Nations as 45 to 55 per cent participation by women.

The GWI encourages all to address new thinking and action, especially in this time of opportunity to link ambitious goals across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thank you, Chair, for this opportunity to speak on behalf of GWI and best wishes for a successful Conference.